Cambodia:

(i) Agreement for Conservation/Restoration of Ta Prom Temple, Siam Reap, Cambodia

(ii) Agreemen relating to Air Services

(iii) The Agreement on Visa Exemption for Diplomatic and Official passports holders.

(e) Singapore and Cambodia agree to further diversify and strengthen bilateral commercial relations.

(f) No, Sir.

Facilities to Hajis at Mecca

3895. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the facilities provided by Government to Hajis;

(b) whether it is a fact that there was no provision of lift for aged Hajis in Mecca where Hajis are housed, making life miserable for ageing pilgrims;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether in spite of Government's spending of Rs.150 crore subsidy as a magnanimous gesture to Hajis such kind of inconvenience is existing and similar reciprocation is not being made by Saudi Arabian Government; and

(e) whether Government would contact the Saudi Government to enter into a joint venture to improve the facilities to help Hajis from India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) In consultation with the Saudi Authorities, the Government of India provides assistance to Indian pilgrims during their stay in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a welfare measure. For this purpose, the Government deploys a number of doctors, nurses and other

paramedic and supplies medicines for the use of pilgrims. It also deputes administrative personnel to assist the Indian Haj pilgrims.

Subsidy is provided to pilgrims performing Haj through Haj Committee for air travel from India to Saudi Arabia and back by the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

(b) and (c) No. Sir. All pilgrims going through the Haj Committee were provided accommodation in Makkah only in buildings with lifts.

(d) The Government of India does not incur any direct expenditure on the Hajis during their stay in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia performing Haj through the Haj Committee. The subsidy element is only limited to the airfare of pilgrims. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia provides a wide variety of services to pilgrims of all countries including those from India. Every year, approximately over 20 lakh pilgrims from different parts of the world perform Haj. Indian pilgrims numbering over one lakh constitute about 8% of the total Haj congregation. The rituals of Haj have to be performed by the entire congregation at the same place and at the same time. This involves simultaneous movement of over 20 lakh pilgrims between the various holy cities and holy sites. This mass movement of the congregation over unfamiliar territory and in harsh weather conditions does occasionally cause some hardship to the pilgrims. However, it is the constant endeavour of the Government to ensure that, in spite of these difficult circumstances, our pilgrims perform their Haj in safety and comfort.

(e) While there is no plan to enter into a joint venture between the two Governments, the Government of India is in regular touch with the Saudi authorities on all aspects of the Haj arrangements with a view to improve the facilities that are provided to the Indian pilgrims.